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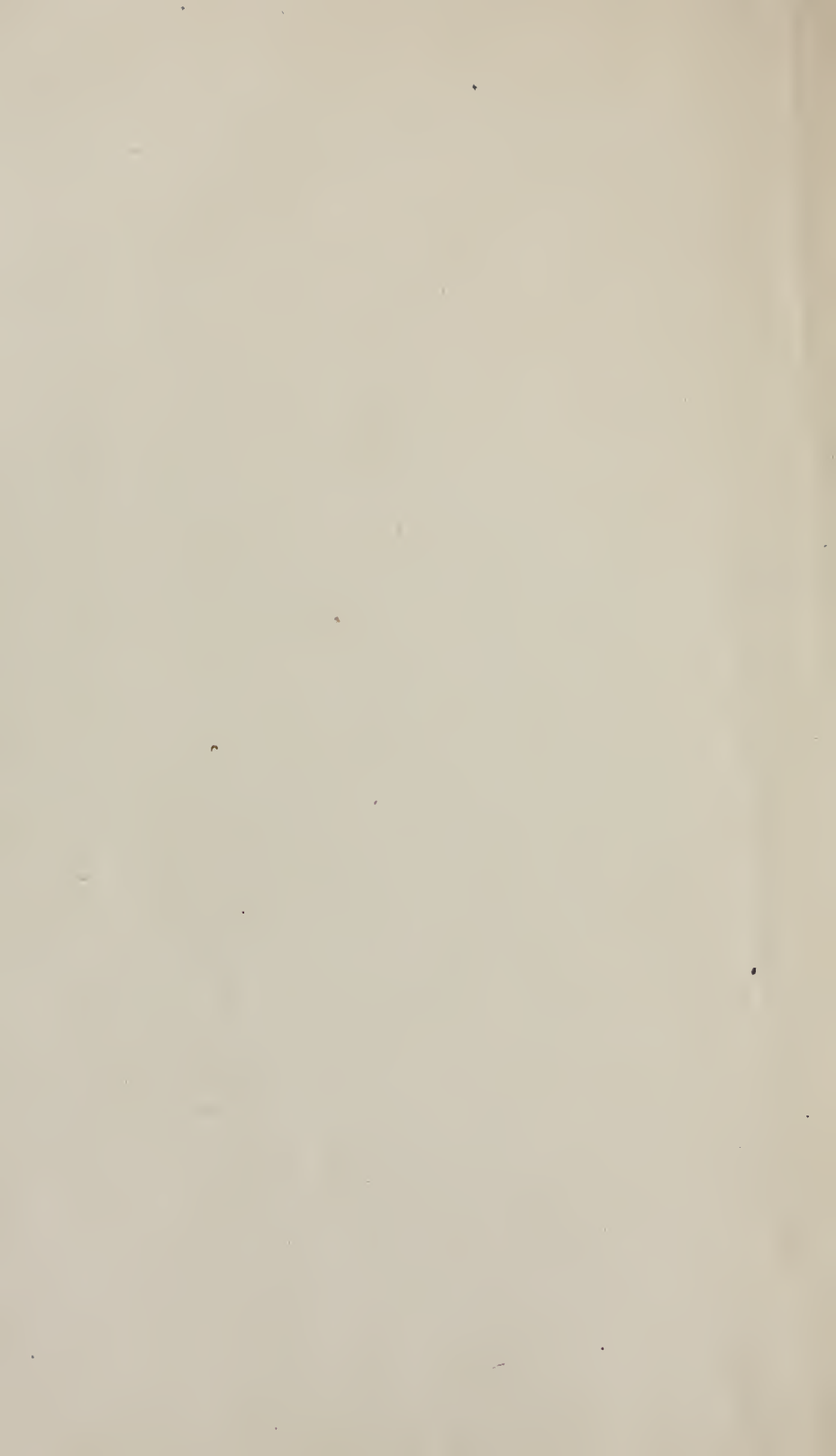
KING'S CHAPEL

AND

THE EVACUATION OF BOSTON,

BY

HENRY WILDER FOOTE.



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THE EVACUATION OF BOSTON.

A DISCOURSE

BY

HENRY WILDER FOOTE,

GIVEN IN KING'S CHAPEL, SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 1876.

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DISCOURSE.

PSALMS xliv., 1: "We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old."

Such passages of Scripture as this—and there are many of them—form one of the most inspiring characteristics of the Bible. They do so in this regard, that they make it speak not of God alone, nor of man alone, but that they bring God and man together. They affirm the great fact of Divine Providence in the grandest way, making it not only to be over individuals, but over humanity; they affirm the great fact of human dependence in the grandest way, making it to be from one generation to another, lifting us up out of our separate and lonely lives into a share in the life of the race, and giving us the only reason for thinking it worth while to have this share, because we see that the life of the race is lived under the eye of God. Such an appeal to the historic faithfulness of God accords with the thoughts which I would bring to your mind at this time.

The peculiar associations of this old church with the Revolutionary chapter of our city's history seemed to

make it desirable to mark here to-day a significant landmark in connection with the evacuation of Boston one hundred years ago. The last service held here during the siege of the city is a picturesque moment in the history of a "lost cause," and it also marks a transitional point in the religious position of this church. The real congregation of to-day and the shadowy congregation of one hundred years ago stand face to face for this hour.

In what I have to say, I must needs touch in part on facts already known to those who have heard the discourses given here some winters ago, on the history of this church. It is a portion of that history which for many years after the Revolution was obscured by the intensity of the popular feeling. The very name of "*King's*" Chapel was changed on the popular tongue to that of the "*Stone*" Chapel, until a wise thought discerned that it could be called the Church of the "King of kings." There was a time when it would have been thought unpatriotic for us not to be ashamed of the fact that King George's officials and the Tory gentry went here to church. But that day is long past, I trust, when we should not be able to speak with respect of many of them. Loyalty to their king and fidelity to their ordination or other official oath compelled them—many of them with an absolutely pure and single mind—to leave their country for conscience' sake; and having left it they had to suffer pains of loneliness and an aching heart, to be strangers in the proud old land which they

had been accustomed to call "mother country" and "home," to endure supercilious patronage or cool indifference from those ruling powers for which they had sacrificed everything, to eat the bread of poverty and grudging charity from the British treasury, to know that they were declared aliens by the land of their birth, their property confiscated, and they made ruined men, and to say with Hamlet:—

"O, what a wounded name,

Things standing thus unknown, I leave behind me."

Besides, the fact is, that the majority of pew-holders here were on the patriot side, and the first minister after the war had been a prisoner of war in a British receiving-ship. And if the church had still needed to prove its American heart, let yonder monument testify of that, with its roll of martyrs in our own war—longer than that of any other church with which I am acquainted. This year, however, is called the year of reconciliation, and if it is to mark the extinction of the embers which have burned so furiously in our own time, surely it may see the flowers of forgiveness bloom over those which have been extinguished for a century.

We stand here among the monuments of a generation utterly gone and of ways of life of which this is well-nigh the only memorial. So far as I am aware, King's Chapel and Christ Church are now the only historical buildings remaining unchanged from before the Revolution of all those in which Boston was once so rich. This church has been received by the present generation as a pre-

cious trust to be guarded carefully for those who are to come after us, and, let us hope, to be prized aright by the whole community which possesses it! When we joined in our forms of worship this morning, I read the prayers in part from the old liturgy which was on this reading-desk one hundred years ago, stamped with the blazon G. R., for King George, and now containing the alterations of the service in the handwriting of James Freeman. The interior, as well as the outside of the building, is almost identically the same as when the Revolution began. Only the stately Governor's pew is gone. All other things remain.

Chief among these is the noble organ still standing opposite, procured from England by subscription of members of the church in 1756. It cost in London £500 sterling, and with all charges here, £637. The bill of lading, still preserved among our papers, is interesting from its pious formula:—

“Shipped by the Grace of God in good order and well conditioned, by Thomlinson, Trecothick & Co., in and upon the good ship called the *Pultney*, whereof is Master under God for this present voyage Thomas Farr and now riding at anchor in the River Thames and by God's Grace bound for Boston New England; to say forty-four cases and parcells containing an organ, etc., etc., etc.

“And so God send the good ship to her desired port in safety. Amen.” A prayer which many lovers of the church must have breathed. The *Boston Gazette and Country Journal* of August 30, 1756, announced

to its readers: "We hear that the organ which lately arrived from London by Capt. Farr for King's Chapel in this town, will be opened on Thursday next in the afternoon, and that said organ (which contains a variety of curious stops never yet heard in these parts) is esteemed by the most eminent masters in England, to be equal, if not superior, to any of the same size in Europe. There will be a sermon suitable to the occasion. Prayers to begin at four o'clock." "There is a very current tradition respecting this organ," says Dr. Greenwood, "that it was selected by Handel himself. Taking into consideration the above reference to 'the most eminent masters in England,' we receive this tradition as founded in truth. And, moreover, as the organ was designed for the King's Chapel in New England, we may readily suppose that His Majesty's favorite musician would at least be desired to give his opinion of its merits, and that this opinion, being favorable, might be called a 'selection,' even if the 'mighty master' gave himself no further trouble with its purpose. Handel died in 1758, and was blind eight years before his death. But sight was not at all necessary in the office supposed to be consigned to him, and though his eyes never could have measured the external proportions of this organ, his ears most probably have judged of its tones and powers, and his own hands rested on its keys." The organ still retains enough of its personality to be the same which has helped the devotions of this house for one hundred and sixteen years. It has been repaired again and again.

In 1860 it was greatly enlarged, and at that time the old key-board on which Handel's hands may have rested was taken away. According to the custom of the period, the keys which now are white were then made of ebony, and the keys which now are black were made of ivory. The outside case, and many of the pipes, and some of the sweetest stops in the instrument remain unchanged.

I shall not attempt to tell the story of the great events of which Boston was the scene and centre in those momentous years, from the times when it heard its last king proclaimed by trumpet from the Old State House balcony, and rejoiced over in King's Chapel, to the day when these walls echoed to the retreating drums of the British troops, and saw the Continental army enter the town in triumph. Three out of the four Royal Governors of this stormy time attended worship in this church, and sat in yonder Governor's pew,—Sir Francis Bernard, Gen. Gage, and Sir William Howe. Gov. Hutchinson was a member of the Brick Church at the North End, but he was friendly to the church, and it is entered in our records, Dec. 1, 1772, that he received the thanks of the church "for procuring the King's Donation for a service of plate and pulpit Furniture for the King's Chapel." Here came Gov. Bernard to hear Dr. Caner's sermon on "The Great Blessing of Stable Times," on the conclusion of the treaty of peace between Great Britain and France in 1763,—the peace which freed our fathers from the fear which had been over them from their first settle-

ment of the country. Here came Gov. Bernard in other darker and more ominous times, and his successors in days blacker yet. As I pore over our old records, the votes of the proprietors and of the vestry, and the long and crowded pages which record the never-ending procession of the dead—pages for the most part utterly silent concerning the events which were rocking Church and State with earthquake throes,—their very silence sometimes speaks more loudly than any words. Now I come to some name famous here then, but never spoken for nearly one hundred years, except as a part of that momentous history; and now again it is the date of a year and month, perhaps even of the *day*, which marks one of the eras in that great time. When the Stamp Act was passed in 1765, and the mob wrought its wild ruin in Lieutenant-Governor Hutchinson's house, they first swept through the house of one of the prominent members of this congregation; and the name of another is forever associated with one of those half-grotesque, half-terrible displays of popular wrath at the famous "Liberty Tree," the great elm at the corner of what is now Washington and Essex Streets, where unacceptable persons were wont to be hung in effigy. Those were the last years of the old-fashioned stately courtliness which had been so associated with the chapel where the viceroy and his little court worshipped. These old walls saw the various costumes of that picturesque period gathered here. Chariots with liveried black footmen brought

titled gentlemen and ladies hither, and the square pews were gay with modes of dress which live for us in Copley's pictures,—the ruffled sleeve and powdered wigs and swords, the judges' robes, the satins and velvets. And now, ever since the passing of the Tea Act in 1767, many a scarlet uniform was seen here too; for the Common had been for nine years whitened with the tents of British troops, sent over to enforce that law. We are left only to imagination for our picture of the varied moods of the congregation which gathered here while that passionate, popular "sea wrought and was tempestuous"; for while some were royal officials, and not a few were loyal subjects of Great Britain, the major part of the congregation was native born, and must have been largely in sympathy with the wild beating of the popular pulse. I doubt not that hearts as true as ever loved their country here ached, when the March night in 1770 heard the fatal shots ring out in King Street which echoed through the continent; and if they counselled moderation, when the South Church yonder was thronged with the people whom Faneuil Hall could not contain after that "Massacre," and when again in 1773 that church saw the great assembly from which the band of men went forth to throw the tea into Boston harbor,—if they dared not counsel resistance it was not because they did not love their country, but because it seemed such madness for this little town to challenge the resistless power of the British Empire. Their judgment was deceived, and they paid the bitter

price of exile and ruin. Surely we can do them the bare justice now of remembering their loyalty and constancy to their own conscience, and in not a few a love of the land which cast them out, which was stronger than exile, and unembittered by poverty and wrong.

Stormily closed the ministry of my predecessor in this place, the last Church of England rector of the King's Chapel, Dr. Henry Caner. His political sentiments were ardent loyalty, as he would have termed them,—obstinate Toryism, as the people of Boston soon came to consider them. But if there were any question what his sentiments were, they are indicated in these sentences which I quote from a short prayer before a printed sermon of his on Thanksgiving for the General Peace, August 11, 1763,—on "The Great Blessing of Stable Times," etc: "Continue thy favor to our sovereign lord King George. . . . Let no unhappy divisions disquiet his reign, or interrupt the internal harmony of his government."

Infirm with bodily infirmities, and in his seventy-seventh year, his age and his position placed Dr. Caner at the head of the Church of England clergy in this part of the country. This church, too, had been attended by the officers of the British army and navy stationed in Boston, which had brought the old minister into yet closer bonds of sympathy and fellowship with these representatives of the king whose church he served. Their red coats were to his eyes the honored uniform of a proud service, while to the popular imagination the

scarlet seemed to be branded by Scripture itself as the livery of sin. Our records show abundantly the pastoral labor which devolved upon Dr. Caner in his relations with his military congregation. The last burials recorded by his trembling hand are those of three soldiers of His Majesty's 65th Regiment of Foot. It may well be, then, that the first rumor of the evacuation of Boston smote on his ear like the breeze that stirs the air before a thunder-storm bursts. He seemed to hear the hoarse voice of the dreaded mob already surging round his house, and crying as Amaziah said to the prophet Amos : "O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there : But prophesy not any more at Bethel : for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." Dr. Caner's escape from Boston is thus described by himself, in a letter dated Halifax, May 10, 1776 :—

"As to the clergy of Boston, indeed, they have for eleven months past been exposed to difficulty and distress in every shape; and as to myself, having determined to maintain my post as long as possible, I continued to officiate to the small remains of my parishioners, though without a support, till the 10th of March, when I suddenly and unexpectedly received notice that the king's troops would immediately evacuate the town. It is not easy to paint the distress and confusion of the inhabitants on this occasion. I had but six or seven hours allowed to prepare for this measure, being obliged to embark the same day for Halifax, where we arrived

the 1st of April. This sudden movement prevented me from saving my books, furniture, or any part of my interest, except bedding, wearing apparel, and a little provision for my small family during the passage.

“I am now at Halifax with my daughter and servant, but without any means of support, except what I receive from the benevolence of the worthy Dr. Breynton.”

I turn now to his hearers on his last Sunday. General Gage, who came in May, 1774, as Captain-General and Governor of Massachusetts, had been a good church-goer, and doubtless his successor was so. Gage heard here one sermon, whose text, at least, well pondered, would have saved seven years of war and hundreds of thousands of lives. For in September, 1774, Rev. Mr. Fayerweather, of Narragansett, records in his diary that he preached in King's Chapel, Boston, before General Gage and his officers, and a very numerous and polite assembly, from the text, “Be kindly affectioned one toward another in brotherly love.” The commentary was written at Lexington and Bunker Hill.

And now let us look into this church as it may have appeared on the last Sunday before the evacuation of Boston by the British troops, and try to call up to our mental vision the faces of those adherents of the losing cause who were gathered here to pray for King George, and that he might have victory over all his enemies. Out of the one hundred and thirteen pews in the church forty were owned by the church itself. Of the families owning or occupying the remaining seventy-three

pews, about thirty were so absolutely on the loyal or Tory side that they had to fly in the great evacuation, the other forty-three being probably on the patriot side. Let us stand in this pulpit with Dr. Caner, and look with his dim eyes in the faces of this portion of his flock who on the next Sunday will be lying with him on shipboard in some of the long line of British vessels that will be lying in Nantasket Roads, so heavily freighted with humiliated pride and disappointed hopes. Thanks to Mr. Sabine's admirable *History of the American Loyalists*, we can trace the fortunes of these defeated men. There, then, they sit in these very pews, men whose names, many of them, were hissing on patriotic American lips, yet to whom now we can often do better justice than the hard measure which our fathers meted out to them. If time would allow, I could tell you the history of almost all of them. But it will be sufficient for me to call back the memory of three or four representative men among them.

An example of the extreme Tories is Charles Paxton, in pew No. 4, with his family of five. Mr. Paxton's thoughts may well be busy, after the roaring cannonade from the rebel works, which has suffered neither him nor any other dweller in Boston to sleep during that dreadful night of Saturday, March 9. He may well be thinking how much of all this is his own work. He is a gentleman "remarkable for finished politeness and courtesy of manners," but the Whigs have cared nothing for that. He has had the honor of being hung in effigy

on the Liberty Tree on Gunpowder-plot day, "between the figures of the Devil and the Pope," with the label, "Every man's humble servant, but no man's friend." He has been "active beyond his associates as one of the Commissioners of Customs." John Adams says of him, that he appeared at one time "to have been Governor, Lieutenant-Governor, Secretary, and Chief-Justice." He has the misfortune to be a courtier of Charles Townshend. Does he think to-day of the quarrel with James Otis in 1769; of the flight of the customs' officers to Castle William to escape the mob after seizing one of John Hancock's vessels for smuggling wine; of the coming of the first troops to Boston, largely at his instigation; of the King Street massacre near his Custom House; of the popular rage when Dr. Franklin sent home copies of the letters which he and others had written privately to England? Never more will he collect customs here or elsewhere. He will die in England, aged eighty-four, in 1788, his name under ban and his property confiscated here. But there are not a few far more gracious names than his.

In pews Nos. 7, 8, sit the family of Dr. Sylvester Gardiner. Dr. Gardiner has been Senior Warden of King's Chapel at intervals for twenty years. An educated physician, a man of great wealth, the proprietor of vast estates to the eastward, which he has done great things to improve, respected by all, and now in his seventieth year, he has no will to leave his home. But the young wife, sitting beside him, has so compromised him with

the Royal party, by her ardent zeal on that side, that he must go. Crowded on the vessel which will bear his family to Halifax, poorly fed, proscribed, and banished in 1778, he yet loves his native country so much that he will voluntarily leave behind him his valuable stock of medicines and drugs for Washington's army to use, — an act which will be rewarded by Massachusetts after the war, by the gift of tickets in the State Land Lottery, from which Dr. Gardiner's heirs will derive the benefit of six thousand acres of land in Washington County, Me. The memory of this prominent man is perpetuated by the name of the town of Gardiner, Me.

In No. 10 sits Isaac Royall, long a member of the Council of the Province, but who had not been sworn into office as a Mandamus Councillor. His noble farm in Medford lies within the rebel lines to-day. He will flee with the rest, and his name will appear among the proscribed and banished in 1778. He must taste the bitterness of neglect from Lord North and Lord Germain, and must die in England in October, 1781, and never lay his dust beside that of his wife and his parents in his beloved Medford. But he is large enough to forgive his country for casting him out, and to bequeath two thousand acres of land in Worcester County to found the first Law Professorship in Harvard University. A genial, generous, hospitable man.

No. 76 is occupied by John Vassall, one of that distinguished family who have now left here only their graves in the Cambridge burial-ground, marked by the

Vas and *Sol*, their coat of arms, and the fine old monument, erected in this church by John's kinsman, Florentius Vassall, of Jamaica, in 1766. Mr. John Vassall has been living in Boston since early in 1775, having been driven by mob from his beautiful home in Cambridge. That stately house is occupied as the headquarters of George Washington, Esq., commander of the rebel muster, and Mr. Vassall's uninvited tenant. And it is to have a new glory, a century later, in being the home of one of New England's most beloved and sweetest poets.

To pews Nos. 31-32 belongs a special history. Here was the State pew, raised on a dais, curtained with crimson; here had been seen Shirley and Bernard and General Gage; and here now the dark and warlike face of Sir Wm. Howe looked sternly forth.

And yet one more remains to speak of, occupying No. 91, a woman beautiful still, though now in middle age, and wearing widow's weeds. The romantic story of Lady Frankland has been told in exquisite verse by one of our own poets. It is a story of sin and penitence, of wonderful escape and strangely varied fortune, such as no poet's imagination could ideally surpass.

And so they went forth from these doors, those representatives of a lost cause, leaving the church, as Dr. Caner supposed, to silence. In his note, in the Register of Marriages, he wrote:—

“March 10 [1776]. An unnatural Rebellion of the Colonies against his Majesties Government obliged the

Loyal Part of his subjects to evacuate their dwellings and substance, and to take refuge in Halifax, London, and elsewhere; By which means the public Worship at King's Chapel became suspended, and is likely to remain so, till it shall please God in the Course of his Providence to change the hearts of the Rebels, or give success to his Majesties arms for suppressing the Rebellion."

Within a month of that date King's Chapel was opened again for an impressive solemnity, as if to pledge it forever to the American cause.

For here were held the solemn obsequies of Dr Warren, when his remains were disinterred from the soldier's grave which he found on Bunker Hill, so soon as order was restored to the liberated town. To this church they were borne with every mark of honor, and here were gathered the noblest and best representatives of the patriot cause, while an eulogy was spoken over them from this pulpit. And then the hospitality of the church was freely given for more than five years to the Old South Church, by the majority of our proprietors remaining here,—an act of poetic reparation for the wrong done almost a hundred years before that to the Old South by Sir Edmund Andros. That church and congregation worshipped here, their own house of prayer having been marred by its use as a riding-school for the British soldiers, and the part of the King's Chapel congregation that remained worshipped with them, and in this pulpit was ordained

at that time one of the ministers of the Old South, the Rev. Joseph Eckley. I may add here that, in commemoration of these interesting historical affiliations of the two churches, your wardens and minister invited the ministers of the Old South Church to represent it here to-day, and to take part in this service, — a part which they were both very reluctantly compelled to decline by imperative preaching engagements.

I have dwelt purposely on this portion of the history associated with the memorable events which fell in the week just opening one hundred years ago, in the little town of Boston, because it is a chapter of the history not usually dwelt upon. Our sympathies as true Americans are with those who entered the town with Washington, not with those who left it with Howe. There are probably very few of us here to-day who are not descended from men who then took their lives in their hands as rebels, either in places of conspicuous service, or at least with the shouldered musket. There can be no one here to-day who does not rejoice that those farmers and sailors of this distant colony had a truer vision than the rulers of the empire, and than those who shared their blindness on this side of the water. But the good of looking back *after one hundred years* is, that we can do justice to both sides. And while we shall have frequent occasion in these coming days to commemorate what our fathers won, we will at least to-day also remember all that was upright and self-sacrificing and true to conscience in those men who went out from this church

with sorrowing hearts, but unreturning feet. They paid for what was mistaken in their action and spirit with poverty and exile. But their example of fidelity and patience we cannot afford to lose.

And yet to-day our thoughts turn with a pride untempered by any pity to those our *fathers*, those who were still the majority of this congregation, those to whom we owe the memories that thrill our blood in our national history, those to whom we owe it, under God, that we have a country. They did a work so large and generous, in calling this nation into life, that all the other nations of the earth could not but share its blessing. Even the proud people from whom we sprang, and from whom that War of Independence tore us free, have long seen that our fathers were really fighting *their* best battle not less than ours. On the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill, the *London Times* said:—

“Not only the Americans, however, but England and the world, have far more substantial reasons for a grateful remembrance of the day. The gain to all sides is great and unquestionable. The greater part of the American contention in that war was equally shared by the British people. The principles of popular representation, and no taxation without it, self-government by popular municipal institutions, the independence of the judicial bench, and complete responsibility in the exercise of all power and patronage, were equally at stake on both sides of the Atlantic. No doubt the sense of

this added to the reckless and inhuman obstinacy with which the British Government persisted in the struggle, long after every man at liberty to use his senses and reason on the question saw that it was hopeless.

“Fortunate was it for England that the question was fought so far from its shores. The triumph of American Independence inaugurated a great but bloodless work at home in the shape of popular reforms, or, rather, in the fuller development of those democratic institutions by which it has been said the British throne is surrounded. Whatever the Americans have gained, we have gained also, and now possess substantially all that they fought for.”

Why was it, let me ask you, that those plain men, bred in a provincial college, or at the plough or the printing press, were able to lay the foundations of an empire, and to see the duty of the hour as the rich and wise could not see it? It seems to me that it was something deeper than a passion for liberty, something nobler than a sense of their wrongs, nothing less than the burning conviction which they had inherited from *their* fathers, that America was a providential people, *a nation in trust with the great ideas of Christianity.*

It is well, then, that we should hail as significant the grand anthem by Handel which has been sung in our service to-day,—the same anthem which half a century ago was sung at the commemoration in Faneuil Hall of the two Presidents of the United States who passed from earth on the fiftieth anniversary of their signing the

Declaration of Independence. We catch and echo the lofty words: "Their bodies are buried in peace, but their soul liveth forevermore."

That which was at the heart of all they did was faith in the invisible power and greatness of Him who is the only "stability" of a people's greatness and power,—a profound sense of being a providential people, called to do a special work in the ages, with the solemn consecration upon it of a mighty destiny. Such a faith lies, indeed, at the heart of every Christian State, and if it were not more or less clearly held by the best men everywhere, nations and commonwealths would crumble to pieces like ropes of sand. But only once before in all history, among the Hebrew race, has any people had so clear conviction and testimony of being called and chosen to a high and peculiar work for the Lord as our fathers had. It was, as has well been said, the old faith in prayer, the old faith in God, the spirit which led the Pilgrims across the sea, the spirit which nerved the hearts of the men of God who fought at Naseby and Marston Moor, the spirit of Israel of old against the Philistines, of David with his stone and sling against the giant of Gath with his armor of proof.

Now, is it only the fond dream of an American heart that these principles of a Christian Commonwealth belong to us still from our fathers? Or are we justified in believing that the sense of the sanctity of law, the possibility of pure justice, the quickness of public con-

science, the sacred humanities of Christ's gospel, the deep consecration of a peculiar work for God, are given to us as a holy trust ?

Fain would we believe it. Nay, will it not be faithless ingratitude to the God of our fathers if we allow ourselves to doubt ?

Whatever public shames cause the patriotic boast for our country to grow dim in this Centennial hour, we will guard against the sin of desponding, — far more against that of growing faithless to our trust. In the faith of those great truths the fathers of this land did their work. And, as it is always, the great conviction filled them, and lifted them up to the full height of their providential opportunity, inspired by the American idea, which is in truth the idea of Christianity itself. Well will it be for us if their faith in God and in man, their spirit of conscience and fidelity and consecration, may quicken us, and our memory of them write itself in larger, deeper, more faithful lives.

“ Among the nations bright beyond compare ?

What were our lives without thee ?

What all our lives to save thee ?

We will not dare to doubt thee,

But ask whatever else, and we will dare ! ”

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